NCA
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PROFILE: THE SOVIET SS-TWENTY MISSILE

ANNCR:

THE SOVIET BALLISTIC MISSILE KNOWN IN THE WEST AS THE SS-TWENTY IS DESCRIBED BY NATO COMMANDER, GENERAL ALEXANDER HAIG, AS A SUBSTANTIAL AND DRAMATIC INCREASE IN THE MILITARY THREAT FACING WESTERN EUROPE. IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT, VOA CORRESPONDENT SEAN KELLY LOOKS AT THE NEW MISSILE AND THE CONTROVERSY THAT SURROUNDS IT :

VOICE:

THE SS-TWENTY FIRST CAME ON THE SCENE ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO WHEN PENTAGON OFFICIALS BEGAN SEEING EVIDENCE OF THE MISSILE'S DEPLOYMENT AGAINST TARGETS IN WESTERN EUROPE. THEY HAVE SINCE ESTABLISHED THAT THE NEW MISSILE IS ALSO BEING BASED IN SIBERIA FOR POSSIBLE USE AGAINST TARGETS IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA.

THE RANGE OF THE SOVIET MISSILE IS AT LEAST THREE THOUSAND KILOMETERS -- ENOUGH TO HIT ANY TARGET IN WESTERN EUROPE, BUT NOT ENOUGH TO BE INCLUDED IN DISCUSSIONS ON LIMITING STRATEGIC ARMS TO MAKE MATTERS MORE COMPLICATED, THE SS-TWENTY IS MOBILE. IT CAN BE MOVED BY TRUCK FROM ONE LAUNCH POINT TO ANOTHER. IT CAN ALSO BE UPGRADED TO INTERCONTINENTAL RANGE FAIRLY EASILY.

THE SS-TWENTY CONSISTS OF THE FIRST TWO STAGES OF THE SS-SIXTEEN, A SOVIET STRATEGIC MISSILE WITH A RANGE REPORTED TO BE OVER EIGHT THOUSAND KILOMETERS. THUS, BY ADDING A THIRD STAGE, THE SS-TWENTY MOVES INTO A DIFFERENT CATEGORY OF MISSILE ALTOGETHER. SOME OFFICIALS HAVE SEEN THIS AS A POTENTIAL PROBLEM IN TRYING TO VERIFY COMPLIANCE WITH A STRATEGIC ARMS LIMITATION AGREEMENT.

JOHN TAYLEOR, EDITOR OF JANE'S ALL THE WORLD'S AIRCRAFT, SAYS THAT "BY BUILDING AND STORING LARGE NUMBERS OF SS-SIXTEEN THIRD STAGES, THE SOVIET UNION WOULD POSSESS THE MEANS TO CONVERT ALL ITS SS-TWENTY MISSILES .. AT ANY TIME, THEREBY INCREASING GREATLY THE INTERCONTINENTAL FORCE." BUT OTHER ARMS CONTROL EXPERTS TEND TO DISCOUNT THIS, SAYING THAT THE SS-SIXTEEN AND THE SS-TWENTY ARE SUFFICIENTLY DIFFERENT TO BE DISTINGUISHABLE.

WHAT WORRIES WESTERN EUROPEANS IS THE COMBINATION OF THE SS-SIXTEEN'S MOBILITY, AND THE FACT THAT IT CARRIES THREE, INDEPENDENTLY-TARGETED, NUCLEAR WARHEADS. THIS REPRESENTS A NEW GENERATION OF SOVIET MISSILE TECHNOLOGY. IT ALSO REPRESENTS IN THE VIEW OF U.S. DEFENSE SECRETARY HAROLD BROWN, "A SOVIET MOVE TO CHANGE THE BALANCE OF ... FORCES IN EUROPE AND, THUS, A THREATENING MOVE."

THE QUESTION IS: WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT? THE SS-TWENTY DOES NOT HAVE THE RANGE TO FALL UNDER THE TERMS OF THE STRATEGIC ARMS LIMITATION TALKS. BECAUSE IT IS BASED IN THE SOVIET UNION, IT IS ALSO CONSIDERED OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS AT VIENNA OVER MUTUAL AND BALANCED FORCE REDUCTIONS.

MEANWHILE, ITS DEPLOYMENT CONTINUES. AND SO DOES THE CONTROVERSY.

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WJL/RTD